Case Study
Northern Kentucky University

Student and Instructor Outcomes Improve Across the Board with Implementation of Connect and SmartBook

With the implementation of Connect, Public Speaking instructor Jeffrey Fox has changed the dynamics of his classes, now focusing on in-class discussion based on material students learn before they come to class. Fox requires Connect assignments to be completed before each lecture, so students have a basis for understanding the material he will be covering. Fox has seen benefits in both scores and student engagement from implementing Connect. Overall, there has been a four percent increase in exam scores and a six percent increase in class-wide speech scores. Additionally, during the semesters in which he used Connect, grades were up, with more students earning an A or B.

Fox noticed students come to class better prepared in the courses where he uses Connect. This enables him to engage on a higher level. Connect has allowed him to spend more time in class reviewing concept application and active learning, and less time grading tests or preparing assignments. Additionally, he has observed students tend to understand concepts earlier based on their work with SmartBook™.

At the same time the attendance averages are up, so students are not only scoring higher, they’re more likely to come to class. “Students enjoy attending class more as an interactive environment instead of straight lecture,” Fox explains.

"Connect provides me more time to focus on working with my students and less on dealing with creating and manually grading assessments.” –Jeffrey Fox

Implementation

Course grade is determined by the following:
10% — SmartBook
20% — Exams administered within Connect
50% — Speeches – completed in Connect for 100 percent online classes
10% — Other miscellaneous activities, some in Connect and some not.
10% — Attendance
Prior to Connect, Fox supplemented work from the textbook *Art of Public Speaking* with written assignments, quizzes, exams and activities – some through Blackboard and some in class. “I used the instructor’s manual provided through the Lucas text to create [them],” he says.

However, three years ago the departmental committee started looking for a new tool that would be affordable to students, easy to use, integrates with Blackboard, (their university’s learning management system at the time) and be inter-active with customizable learning features. Put simply, Connect was the solution.

Once Connect was in place, Fox eliminated the text-based weekly quizzes and re-placed them with SmartBook modules that provide students with a more individu-alized, knowledge based experience. “These modules meet each student where he/she is in the learning process and allows for a more customized experience,” Fox says. Each module is not complete until the content is mastered, so it allows students time to keep trying, and absorb the material that is challenging them.

On a weekly basis Fox’s students complete two to four assignments in Connect. These assignments consist of a SmartBook module with anywhere from 20-35 questions. Longer chapters contain higher question quantities. “I assign multiple modules in a class day depending on what we are covering and where we are in the semester,” he says. Additionally, Fox employs the Question Bank feature in Connect to assign work for students on days where class might be cancelled. The assignments allow for students to ‘virtually’ keep up with class content, he says, “and for me to move on with the course the next time the class meets.”

The class uses Connect in conjunction with their learning management system (LMS), which the school is transitioning from Blackboard to Canvas. Connect works seamlessly with either, he says. “Connect integrates smoothly, so after first day of class set up, students only need to access the LMS to enter Connect,” he explains. The grade center syncs well also, he adds. “If there are any problems, a quick manual sync fixes it every time. This allows for me to fully use Connect, but only keep one grade book in my LMS.”

Fox doesn’t spend an excessive amount of time preparing for lectures, in part thanks to his own experience with the class. However, he spends time reviewing reports in Connect to make any necessary modification to his lectures. “In some cases, my lecture prep is a little longer with Connect since I do more customizing for each class.” This is not a bad thing, he adds. In fact, he relies on the Most Challenging Learning Objectives report, as it enables him to adjust his lectures to emphasize areas where he knows students are struggling the most. “Connect pro-vides a way to meet students where they are in the learning experience,” he says.

Additionally, students tend to understand concepts earlier based on their work in SmartBook prior to the class where the material is covered. This makes for a more active class with discussion and application and less
routine lecture. This also allows for Fox to have more speech work days where he can work with students individually, and they can work in peer groups, or help with outlining and speech preparation.

The greatest time savings for Fox is due to Connect and comes from the reduced time administering quizzes and exams. He replaced weekly quizzes with Smart-Book modules, which allow for a more customized experience for students. He also replaced his in-person mid-term and final exams with the exams in Connect. “In using Connect, I am able to save time on running Scantrons or grading written exams.”

The policy setting feature in Connect allows Fox to set up exams with questions pooled from a set area of content. This offers a unique exam for each student, he says, “which makes me feel more comfortable putting the exams online and having them auto-grade.”

Some reports within Connect provide unique benefits, he says. For example, one of the reports he finds most useful is the Connect Insight dashboard; he uses the insight dashboard to get a quick glance into which students are in need of remediation. The student performance report allows him to identify when a student is completing an assignment and how much of it. “This, along with the other reports, allows me to create a more customized experience for each student,” says Fox.

He uses the At-risk Student Report to get a quick glance at which students need remediation. It also shows him who is engaged in the work in Connect.

One of the SmartBook reports of greatest value to Fox is the Progress Overview Report which allows him to see how his students are performing. The Missed Questions Report helps show him which individual questions are frequently missed. Also, as noted above, the Most Challenging Learning Objectives Report displays which areas students struggle with the most, enabling him to revise class discussions and lectures accordingly.

**Overall, Connect provides the speech class with a platform for student learning that is unique and customized to the level of each student.**

“Students who understand the material can move through the SmartBook assignments faster. Those who need extra help can spend more time in the e-book as well as use the supplemental learning resources in the margins,” Fox points out. “Connect provides a way to meet students where they are in the learning experience.”

Cost was an important consideration for the class when the program was selected, Fox says. He has many students who comment on the cost savings by using Connect, and how much they appreciate it compared to the cost of a paper book. He continues, “Additionally, many students like the literal burden lifted off of their shoulders from carrying around books.” Connect can be accessed digitally and does not require additional physical resources. “Some students have

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**Course Description:**
CMST 101: Public Speaking focuses on development of understanding of the oral communication process while improving oral communications, and studying idea and message development and effective delivery of ideas.

**Institution Profile:**
Northern Kentucky University is an undergraduate, liberal arts institution that also offers graduate programs. It has more than 12,000 undergraduate students and more than 1,900 graduate/law students, as well as nearly 2,000 faculty and staff. NKU offers the Salmon P. Chase College of Law and the College of Informatics. In addition, it includes the College of Arts and Sciences, Haile/US Bank College of Business, the College of Education and Human Services, the College of Health Professions, and the Honors College.
commented on how fun the modules can be - it is like a game," he adds. Fox requires 30 percent of the course grade to come from Connect. And says, “I encourage others to do the same.”

**Results Achieved**

For students, the program has increased performance. The proof is in the numbers. Overall, speech grades have improved since using Connect by six percent (Figure 1). Fox attributes this increase to SmartBook. “The interactive textbook with modules has provided the students an opportunity to engage the material differently than previously and between that and class lectures, the material is sticking more,” says Fox.

![Figure 1: Average Speech Grade](image)

Fox has more A's and fewer D's and F's with Connect (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Grade Distribution Averages](image)

Student engagement and success have all been impacted with Connect including a 3% increase in final exam score averages (Figure 3). “The recharge option, the option to redo the modules entirely, and the student report features all provide a wealth of options for students to review challenging content and better prepare for exams,” reports Fox.
Additionally, Fox spends less time on grading and administering tests, and more time on engaged discussions and lectures (Figure 4). “The use of Connect has allowed me to spend more time in class reviewing concept application and active learning, and less time watching students take quizzes and exams and re-viewing homework,” says Fox (Figure 5). He adds, “Additionally students tend to understand concepts earlier based on their work in the SmartBook prior to the class the material is covered.”

**Conclusion**

The greatest impact Fox has seen in his class, is Connect’s influence on student preparation. “As a result of students using Connect, they come to class more prepared - especially when you require the module be due before the class the material is covered.”
In general, most students are not going to read an entire book, he points out. With Connect and SmartBook, students can focus on areas where they need the most help. “Even if a student comes to class without reading, but has completed the module anyway, he/she is still more exposed to the content than otherwise - by not looking at the book and not having a module to complete,” Fox says.

For the students themselves, Connect offers a way to increase their mastery of the material, save money and have some fun. According to one student: “SmartBook was good. I did the modules because they were mandatory,” and in the process, “realized that they were an amazing tool to better understand the content.”

“Cost is one of our top factors in textbook selection,” Fox says, “and Connect allowed us to use a pedagogically superior book and use it in a cost effective and digital way.”

Jeff Fox teaches CMST 101, Public Speaking and CMST 340, Strategies of Persuasion at NKU. As a part of his teaching, he stays involved with the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project, adding to his passion for exposing students to service/experiential learning.

Jeff is a graduate of Northern Kentucky University with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations and a minor in Professional Writing. He also received his Master’s Degree in Communication, as well as a Communication Teaching Certificate.

“It is the way of the future—embrace it!”